DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 025 574 UD 007 644

Report on Three Demonstration Projects in the City Schools from the New York City Commission on Human Rights.

New York City Commission on Human Rights, N.Y.
Pub Date 68
Note- 28p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.50
Descriptors- Administrator Role, Board of Education Role, *Community Involvement, Community Schools, *Decentralization, *Demonstration Projects, Governing Boards, Parent Role, Public School Systems, Racism, Teacher Role
Identifiers- Harlem, IS 201, New York City, Ocean Hill Brownsville, Two Bridges

Reported are the findings of hearings on the operation of three demonstration projects, IS 201, Two-Bridges, and Ocean Hill-Brownsville, in decentralized school districts in New York City. The hearings were concerned with the impact of the projects on the schools and community in these districts and with any evidence of improved education as a result of decentralization. In addition to discussing the projects in each district, the report describes the roles of the parents, teachers, supervisors, and central Board participating in the projects, and discusses the increased community participation and problems of staffing and fair political participation which accompany decentralization. Also, it stresses the need for safeguards against possible abuses on the part of local governing boards in a decentralized school system. (EF)

ED0255574

report on three demonstration projects in the city schools from the new york city commission on human rights

07644 E

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

report on three demonstration projects in the city schools from the new york city commission on human rights

ED025574

UD 007 644

Hearing Commissioner: Dorothy Hart Hirshon

Staff: Thomas H. Allen
Harriet I. Pickens
Janet Bryant
Naydene Paysoure

Volunteers: Victor Marrero
Irving Spitzberg

February-March, 1968

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 5

II. THE THREE DEMONSTRATION DISTRICTS—THEORY AND FACT .. 7

A. General Views of the Planning and Governing Boards 7

B. Development and Operation of the Three Districts 8

IS 201 3

Ocean Hill-Brownsville 11

Two-Bridges 13

III. THE ROLES OF THE PARTICIPANTS 16

The Parents 16

The Teachers 17

The Supervisors 18

The Board of Education and the Central Administration 18

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS 19

Increased Participation 20

New Staff Under Decentralization 22

Representation 22

Community Control and Racism 24

Integration 25

Need for Safeguards 26

Summary 26-27

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Human Rights in New York City has held closed hearings on the operation of the three decentralized districts in the New York City public school system — IS 201, Ocean Hill-Brownsville and Two-Bridges. In our inquiry, we were interested in the impact of these experimental projects on race relations in the schools and in the communities. We were concerned further with determining if education was improved through decentralization.

We here report the findings of our investigation.

In December 1967, the Bundy Report confirmed the decline in the quality of education in New York City's public schools and recommended decentralization of the system in the hope that more community participation in the schools would help reverse the decline. This Commission found many reasons to support the conclusions of the Bundy panel.

Throughout our history, the public school has been as it should be a community institution, the one place where all in the community could unite behind one interest shared by everyone — education of our children. In many sections of New York City this idea has faded quickly into a memory of the good old days of public education.

We are concerned because the rift is widening. More and more, the city's schools are becoming scenes of conflict, division and even violence. There is rising tension within the community over the schools: struggle between parents and teachers, students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and within each of these groups of interested parties.

Out of these conflicts has emerged a demand for community control of the schools. The trouble and the call for local control have been reported by the press as racially inspired. We feel that at present this deep unrest is grounded on dissatisfaction with results achieved by the present organization of the City's educational system.

Complaints about the existing system voiced to us over and over by parents, teachers, supervisors and community leaders, though not new, bear repetition. Migration of large numbers of Negro and Puerto Rican families into New York City has changed the composition of the City's schools and has created need for a system that meets the new challenge. As now organized, the City's school system is too big and too uniform to take adequate note of this extraordinary change. Under the existing structure, what is particular is too often flattened out into uniformity, and what is special may be discarded as not relevant to the general experience. Those concerned with the process have tried to point out the need for change, but have found the system unresponsive and insulated by a massive, almost impenetrable bureaucracy.

The system's unresponsiveness to the demand for change was the strongest and most consistent grievance we heard and, in our estimation, the single most important source of tension in the schools. Many parents -- even officers of Parent Associations -- expressed a feeling of isolation of the school from the community. Community witnesses expressed the feeling that school authorities reflect the white society's paternalistic attitude; i.e. that whites always know best; therefore, they do not consider seriously local demands for change.

Parents and community spokesmen complained that they often felt like strangers in the schools. They said that the schools have not provided an atmosphere in which they could feel welcome--not even to ask why it was that their children were not learning.

These complaints may not describe the majority of the city's schools; unfortunately, judging by the number of complaints, a disproportionate number concern ghetto schools. More unfortunate is that there is little in the current organization to discourage this type of attitude. Parents feel powerless to do anything about it. Only mass protest after serious incidents has worked for them on occasion.

The feeling of powerlessness and remoteness from the source of decisions is not unique with the parents and the community. It is shared by students, teachers and supervisors, all of whom charge that there is not enough flexibility in the system to accommodate their demands. Teachers feel closed out of participation in educational policy-making. They feel that they are professional and want to be treated like professionals, but find their standing and voice diminished. Even supervisors we listened to claimed that they were removed from the true source of authority and that they have no real power to bring about change. In this respect, we echo the experience of the Bundy panel:

> Time after time the Panel and its staff were told that some other center of responsibility -- a principal, or a district superintendent, or the United Federation of Teachers, or the Board of Education, or the Board of Examiners, or parents themselves -- had the capacity or authority to improve some aspect of the system but somehow would not use it. And time after time the Panel heard from all these other parties of the frustration and limitations that now constrict them.

Confronted with a vast, immovable and impersonal structure, the reaction of the interested parties until recently has been hopelessness and indifference. But as awareness of the shortcomings of the system has increased and its unresponsiveness continues, reactions have changed. Teachers have resorted to unionization and strikes in order to be heard. The community, even more frustrated in its attempt to find a sympathetic ear, is more and more resorting to the only means

that it has seen succeed: direct action, demonstration, publicity and even violence. Almost daily we read reports of parents and students attacking school officials, and of conflicts within the schools among students and faculties. Of course, there are other causes for these developments; but, we are satisfied that the current system's insensitivity to the views of the parties at interest is the most fundamental explanation.

The lesson we learn from these events is clear: many people in the ghettos have become acutely aware that education provides the only path for their children to rise out of the ghetto. But, they have lost confidence in the ability of the present school system to educate their children, and are quickly losing patience with the system's inability to do anything to change this. At the moment, frustrations from powerlessness are rising so high that swift change is needed if we are to spare our schools from becoming scenes for more serious division and violence.

We believe that effective decentralization is an answer to the worsening of relations between school and community, and to the rising tensions engendered within the schools by the present system in disadvantaged areas. The hearings upon which we base our opinions have been extensive, and we do believe that the evidence presented to us formed an adequate basis for our findings.

II. THE THREE DEMONSTRATION DISTRICTS -- THEORY AND FACT

A. General Views of the Planning and Governing Boards

Although there are differences in the details of the three demonstration decentralization projects, they share a common plan. The leaders of the three districts have made similar demands for local power and community control; they differ mainly in the amount of actual power received.

The plans for each district were formulated by Planning Boards or Councils, composed of representatives of parents, community groups, teachers, and supervisors.

The local Governing Boards, which were to exercise community control, were elected in each of the demonstration projects, although none has been formally recognized by the Board of Education.

In all three districts the composition of the Governing Boards followed the model of the planning bodies, with: parent representatives elected by the parents in each school in the project, at least one parent from each school; teacher representatives elected by the teachers in each school; supervisory representatives -- principals and assistant principals -- elected by the supervisors in the district; community representatives from organizations and institutions in each district

chosen by the elected parent and teacher representatives. One project also included representatives elected by the residents of the district.

Teacher representative positions on the Boards have not all been filled because a number of UFT locals have persuaded teachers in some of the demonstration district schools to boycott the Governing Boards.

In IS 201 and Two-Bridges the local Boards govern five schools -- in each case one intermediate school and its feeder elementary schools. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville district embraces eight schools on the same model. The Governing Boards have asked for comprehensive powers over their district schools: they have requested authority to appoint Unit Administrators to superintend the demonstration districts; power to recruit, appoint and evaluate teachers and supervisors; authority to set educational standards, determine a curriculum and choose texts; and power over school budgets.

How much authority the Boards actually have is still unclear, for the Board of Education has not yet announced a formula for recognition of the Governing Boards that will allow them the full range of powers they have requested. In none of the districts does the Governing Board feel that it has any meaningful control of the schools. The bulk of their existence has been spent attempting to gain recognition as well as definition of the scope of their function and authority.

B. Development and Operation of the Three Districts

IS 201

Of the three demonstration school projects, that of IS 201 in Harlem has received the most publicity, most of it unfavorable. Chaos in the schools, racism and black power politics are some of the difficulties associated with community control over the schools in the Harlem district. We find that much of the bad publicity surrounding the IS 201 demonstration project ignores one important fact: the district's Governing Board inherited a deeply involved controversy already several years old.

The origin of the controversy may be traced to 1958, the year that the Board of Education announced plans to build 201 at its present site. Parents and community leaders at that time objected to the location which they felt would make integration of the school impossible. The plan was postponed until 1962, when the Board of Education revised it and assured the parents that the school would be integrated and that it would be staffed and equipped to guarantee quality education that would attract white students and experienced teachers from outside of Harlem.

As it later became clear that the demand for meaningful integration would not be satisfied, the parents asked for some local control over the school, including a voice in the selection of teachers and super-

visors, a role in evaluating and recommending educational programs and standards, a curriculum designed to raise student achievement, an integrated experienced staff, and, initially, a Negro or Puerto Rican principal and at least two Negro or Puerto Rican assistant principals.

The Board of Education resisted these demands in negotiations with parents and community leaders, maintaining that it had no authority to delegate its own authority to the community. This basic dispute continued through the spring, summer and fall of 1966, and, in fact, still is continuing. Its results have been felt in both school and community.

IS 201 opened amid vast confusion that has hampered the operation of the school ever since. Parents and community spokesmen, at the peak of the disagreement with the Board of Education, objected to the first principal appointed by the Board of Education and tried to force his removal. Teachers and supervisors sided with the principal and pressured the Board to retain him. This principal transferred after a few months. The school since has had three acting principals. In one of these changes, the acting principal and two assistant principals were allowed by the Board of Education to begin leaves of absence on the same day. Teachers, especially the experienced, withdrew in large numbers. Within one year, according to the district superintendent, as many as twenty-five vacancies existed at one time. Because it was new, the school had initial shortages of books and supplies, and some of its equipment malfunctioned. Students reacted to all the confusion creating a great discipline problem.

In the spring of 1967, several members of the negotiating committee which had represented the community in the 201 discussions with the Board of Education obtained a foundation grant to support a decentralization experiment involving IS 201. The same group consulted with two university professors in drafting a plan to govern the experiment. The United Federation of Teachers cooperated with the group in drafting the final revisions of this proposal. Discussion of the plan in the schools began in May and June. After discussion and revisions, the teachers in two of the schools that now are part of the project voluntarily voted to be included in the decentralization plan; in the other two schools, the teachers rejected participation. This plan was the basis of the projects as described in the preceding section of this report.

Planning the implementation of the proposal took place during the summer of 1967. Members of the organizing group were central figures on the Planning Board. Few teachers participated at that stage.

School opened in the fall of 1967 with the teachers on strike. The strike heightened racial feelings in the community. Many parents felt that in calling the strike, the white-controlled teachers' union

demonstrated lack of concern for the children. In some schools, proportionately more Negro than white teachers worked during the strike. The Planning Board opposed the strike and warned teachers who stayed out that the Planning Board would evaluate their interest in the children when they returned to work. After the strike, some members of the Planning Board attempted to carry out the threatened screening of striking teachers, but abandoned the plan when the UFT protested. The move, however, antagonized and frightened many teachers and, more than anything else, strengthened their opposition to the local Board.

Elections for the permanent Governing Board were held in December 1967. Voting was very light among the parents. Several members elected to the Governing Board had served on the Planning Board and were part of the same active group which had controlled the early development of the project.

Since its election, the Governing Board's chief concern has been to gain recognition from the Board of Education and agreement on its authority. Earlier this year the Governing Board selected a Unit Administrator for the project and a principal for IS 201. But the Board of Education found that both lacked the required education credits to qualify for the posts and for several weeks withheld recognition. The Board of Education finally approved the appointments on an acting basis.

With the miniscule authority that it has been allowed the Governing Board has had to face the great disorder that it inherited. Its task has been complicated by much adverse publicity blaming conditions in the schools and the community on the local Board or on the decentralization experiment. Particularly damaging have been reports which have treated many of the events that have occurred at IS 201 since the experiment began as issues of race. To much of the public the Malcolm X memorial service, for example, was nothing more than a black racist gathering sponsored by the local Board. The community's demand for appointment of a Negro principal has also been treated as an instance of racism. We feel that these charges are unjustified.

Testimony we heard from parents and community people was unanimous and convincing that the community resented the Board of Education's appointment and later reinstatement of the original white principal not on personal or racial grounds but because the incident was a symbol of the community's powerlessness in a matter that had become a deep concern. In the words of one parent leader: "The objection was, we wanted to be involved in the selection of a principal."

The Malcolm X memorial was an example of the distinct merit of the idea of community control as it may operate in any district: the school being used as a community institution in honoring the community's own heroes. This was the goal of the IS 201 Governing Board when it approved a service in the school in memory of Malcolm X.

Most of the people, both black and white, who described the program to us agreed that the closing remarks made by a consultant to the Governing Board, not scheduled to speak as part of the program, were considered objectionable but that the rest of the four hour service was "solemn and dignified." It is unfair to condemn the entire program as racist on the basis of the closing statement alone, or to conclude, as many have done, that the Governing Board had sponsored a racist service in the school.

One witness, after reading the press coverage of the memorial, requested permission to give us her impressions:

> Finally there was an article in the paper toward the end of the week that referred to the whole thing as a racist gathering. It wasn't until the very end of the article that they mentioned that this had been a memorial on Malcolm X.
>
> So, my feeling was that the impression people would get from reading the papers that there was an anti-white racist rally up in Harlem in a school, which would be outrageous. I suppose; and, I didn't feel that this was what took place.
>
> I am white and I was there in the second row and I didn't feel I was about to be massacred. I didn't feel unwelcome or hated.

OCEAN HILL-BROWNSVILLE

During the time we interviewed witnesses, this district was the least controversial of the three and had received more authority than the others.

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville District grew out of events demonstrating great community interest in the schools. Several of the members of the present Governing Board had been active in the "Independent School Board," a parent and community group seeking to improve the education offered in District 17 of the City school system. Many of the same people also were active in planning the opening of a new intermediate school, IS 55. The advisory committee for IS 55 provided the vehicle for the initial planning of this demonstration project. Because the leaders of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville project had a record of involvement in public education in the area, the experiment had an environment for accomplishment.

The planning for the Ocean Hill-Brownsville District began early in the Spring of 1967, an advantage over the haste which accompanied the initial stages of planning in the other districts. Early notification permitted some teachers to participate in the planning during the summer, but did not induce meaningful participation by supervisors.

Elections for the Governing Board were held in August, and in spite of the season, well over 1000 votes were cast in the election of parent and community representatives. By early fall of 1967 the Governing Board was fully organized.

The Governing Board faced many early troubles, most of them resulting from the Board of Education's delays in allocating it funds and office space for its operation. The local Board's most serious and continuing difficulty has been, as in the other districts, obtaining full recognition from the Board of Education.

As its first function, the Governing Board was allowed to recommend for appointment a Unit Administrator and principals for the elementary schools in its district. The Governing Board appointed a multi-racial staff of principals in these schools: One white and, for the first time in New York City, two Negro males, a Puerto Rican and a Chinese principal. It also appointed a Negro as Unit Administrator. But these important advances required a special ruling from the State Commissioner of Education authorizing selection of principals who had State certification but were from outside the City's examination lists. This ruling and the appointments made under it were successfully challenged in court by the Council of Supervisory Associations and are now on appeal.

The impact of these appointments, as well as the possibilities that community control offers for remedying conditions in public education, were made clear to us by the experience of the newly appointed principal of PS 155 in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the city's first Puerto Rican principal. By his account, this principal entered a school in which the faculty was generally hostile to him and to decentralization. The senior supervisors had transferred out. The parents association was moribund and some tension existed between the white, Negro and Puerto Rican students.

The new principal slowly gained the respect of his faculty; but he quickly gained the respect of the students, parents and the community. He is able to speak to the Puerto Rican parents and students in their own language and to cooperate with the other principals of the project in regard to their Spanish-speaking students. This ability has enabled him to establish a rapport with the Puerto Rican community and the relationship has in turn put the school administration within reach of Spanish-speaking parents and students. Commenting on his advantage, he said, "Also for the first time, many parents are complaining now that they have an opportunity to complain." When any racial trouble develops among the students, he talks with them together, and attempts to reconcile them.

The new principal has also taken the idea of community control seriously. With the freedom for innovation that the experiment has allowed him he has tried to make his a bi-lingual school to help children who are not yet fluent in English. He would like to introduce

local culture into the curriculum. To help him put these ideas into practice he has appointed committees of parents to advise him and his teachers on problems of curriculum, reading programs, guidance and discipline. He stresses the importance of community involvement and suggests that the responsibility for insuring community involvement lies with the principal. He has been a strong supporter of the Unit Administrator's daily meetings with all the principals of the project.

These actions have had encouraging results in PS 155. There has been a marked growth in community and parent interest in the school. The Parents Association has become active, with vastly increased attendance at meetings. The President of PS 155's Parents Association, is delighted with this development. In her words: "It is marvelous. If I send for a parent now, they come right away. All I say is I need help in school, and they come right away."

Increased parent interest and participation in the schools since decentralization began in Ocean Hill-Brownsville was not unique to PS 155; parents and staff members from other schools in the district reported the same phenomenon. Parents have responded to the interest which the new principals have shown and to the opportunity to be heard on the issues concerning their children's education.

TWO-BRIDGES DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

The Two-Bridges demonstration district, located in an East side area between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, encompasses one of the most heterogeneous areas in the City. Its ethnic division in the schools is estimated as 35 per cent Chinese, 40 per cent Puerto Ricans, 12 per cent Negroes, and 12 per cent whites. Relations among the various community groups have traditionally been harmonious. But recently the community has divided, largely along racial lines and partly over the schools.

We can understand the operation of the Two-Bridges demonstration district only in light of the central role played by a community center which operated much of the neighborhood's recreational and welfare activities, and its affiliate, a parent-training organization. The latter was set up to train parents from low income areas to assist in the schools and to encourage them to become involved in school activities.

Unlike the experiences at IS 201 and Ocean Hill-Brownsville, decentralization at Two-Bridges did not originate from moves within the schools and community for educational reform. It arose from the community center's need of money to finance its programs. In the spring of 1967 representatives from the center sought funds from a foundation. The foundation was more interested in funding educational projects as evidenced by its support of the other decentralization experiments. It therefore advised the center's representatives

that it was prepared to support an experiment in school decentralization in their district.

Members of the community center drafted a proposal to obtain the foundation grant and agreed to assign planning of the project to a Planning Council comprised of parents, teachers, and community representatives. Planning began near the close of the school year. Again participation by teachers and supervisors was slight, partly because many had made commitments for the summer. And again as in IS 201, the major force in the operation was the community group that had initiated the project. Indeed the schools chosen for the project were those in which this group operated its training program. Of the elementary schools designated, one was not a feeder to the junior high school in the project.

Early in the fall of 1967, when planning was completed, a number of parents and other community groups became disenchanted with the details of the decentralization plan and especially with the domination by members of the parent training organization. Teachers were also hostile to this group because of its active opposition to the teachers' strike. During the campaign for election to the Governing Council, held in December 1967, the election became a contest between candidates affiliated with the parent training group and those running independently or from the schools' parents associations. Those closely allied with the training group, in part because of better organization, greater resources and mutual assistance, captured seven of the fourteen positions filled by the election.

More than 1900 votes were recorded, about 1700 from parents and residents. Two of the five schools, following UFT policy directing teachers not to serve on the councils, did not elect teacher representatives.

Confusion and conflict have attended the Two-Bridges project from its origin. Some of the explanations parallel the experiences at IS 201.

Confusion has existed at the administrative level. Upon the recommendation of the Planning Council, the Board of Education unofficially recognized an Educational Director for the project. But, as in the other projects, the Board of Education has not formally recognized the authority of the Governing Council. When the Governing Council was elected, however, it did not confirm the appointment of the Educational Director on a permanent basis. The Board of Education's delay in recognizing the Council has contributed to divisions within the Council and the community. As the acting Educational Director put it: "Since they didn't have any power and authority to do anything, they spent time going after each other."

From its inception the project has faced opposition from parents and teachers who claim that the Planning and Governing Councils do

not represent the parents or the community. They resent domination by members of one community group. Because of this group's aggressive campaigning during the election for the Governing Council, parents and teachers feel that the Council is governed by people more concerned with personal power than with education.

Many parents and residents are concerned with the racial politics that were introduced into the community by the elections for the Governing Council and which has accompanied some of the new programs into the schools. An example of this conflict occurred over the allocation of federal money for remedial programs. Each school was allocated a sum of money by the Governing Council for remedial programs. Parents in each school decided how this money was to be used. In two schools disagreement developed over whether the money should be used for English and remedial reading classes or for Chinese classes. A vitriolic campaign was fought in the parent associations and in the community which grew into a contest between the Chinese and other groups in the schools. The Chinese parents, by campaigning in the Chinese press in favor of Chinese courses, were able to unite and outnumber other parent groups in passing their program of Chinese classes. This program passed in spite of Federal policy that the money is supposed to be used for remedial programs and not for general enrichment courses. In this controversy one of the leaders of the Chinese parents was the director of the Chinese program of the parent training group and later a member of the Governing Council.

As in the other districts parents were further aroused by the removal of special services from the schools. Such services as remedial reading instruction, guidance and medical specialists were withdrawn by the Board of Education after the project began. Since the schools in the project formed a separate district, the Board of Education argued, they could not receive services provided to them by the old district. Some parents naturally associate the lack of the services with the decentralization experiment.

Many of the parents' and teachers' concerns about community divisions are, of course, justified. But it does not follow that decentralization should be regarded solely as the cause. It was not decentralization that divided the community. It was the unfortunate circumstance that, as in IS 201, control was acquired by a group, some of whose members antagonized many parents and teachers.

Despite the hostilities running through the district, the project has demonstrated the depth of parent and community interest in the schools. Even though divided, parent involvement has increased. If in pursuit of narrow and separate interests more parents participate, the project needs only strong leadership to demonstrate to the community that the gains from unity would be greater. And, moreover, that the community was debating educational issues itself offers some promise for the future of community control of the public schools.

III. THE ROLES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The Parents

There is an attitude among a number of parent representatives, especially among those who have had little formal education, that diminishes their effectiveness as members of the boards. These parents tend to play a passive role. They feel reluctant to voice opinions on educational matters in which they feel untrained or unqualified, and tend to defer to those members with more education and community standing.

On the other hand, there is a second group, more active in community action organizations than in parents associations, who, working as a group, are able to be the dominant voices on the Boards. Experience in the IS 201 and Two-Bridges districts demonstrated that one community action group, through superior organization, mutual assistance and more resources can gain control of a number of parent and community representative positions on the board, to the disadvantage of independent parents and parents whose only group activity is the school parents association.

Domination by community action groups has caused resentment among many parents, especially those active in the parents associations who feel that the parent members should come from the PA's. The parents distrust control by these groups and feel that politics and personal gain rather than education are uppermost among their motives. This has raised charges from parents that the Boards are not representative of the community and that parents have a small voice on them.

As a whole, the only members of the Governing Boards who are likely to have broad community standing are the community representatives. But since community representatives are selected by the parent and teacher members, whether or not they are truly representative of the community may depend on the composition of the rest of the Governing Board. A dominate group among the parents and teachers may be able to select community members who are sympathetic to that group. This partially explains domination by one community organization at IS 201 and Two-Bridges.

Some parents oppose the Governing Boards because of personal objections to certain Board members. They associate some members with extremist views and tactics and claim that these individuals at times have used threats and coercion. We were told of several incidents of parents and teachers being intimidated. But in fact some of these incidents involved people who were not Governing Board members or agents but who were thought by parents to be members, in a few instances because they falsely represented themselves as members.

We do find, however, that among the Board's supporters, many extremists have been the most active, and that a few of them, at IS 201 in particular, were linked with the Governing Board as part of its advisory staff.

Another source of parent hostility to the Governing Board is grounded on racial and class biases, though this is not openly admitted. Some parents distrust Governing Board members whom they deem unqualified to be making decisions on educational policies. As succinctly described to us by a member of one Governing Board: "They say, (about) their neighbor -- 'This illiterate person, what does he know?'"

The Teachers

The teachers have played a rather quixotic role in the decentralization experiments. In some schools, particularly those in which the principal or union chapter chairman strongly supported the projects, the teachers voted to accept the program. In others, they rejected it. Individually, a number of teachers in all three districts have participated enthusiastically in the planning operation of the projects; and, indeed, the UFT through local officers cooperated in the initial planning stages. However, as the planning advanced -- and, long before any of the Governing Boards were constituted -- the United Federation of Teachers formally advised its members not to participate in the experiments as members of the Boards. Some of the schools in the projects followed this position and did not elect teacher representatives to the Governing Boards.

Despite early support of the plan drafted by two university professors and assertions of support for decentralization in theory, in practice the UFT has opposed the three projects. Leaders of the three demonstration districts repeatedly charged that the UFT had done everything in its power to retard the experiments. And even teachers who supported decentralization admitted that the UFT's opposition created great difficulties for them and the projects.

Many teachers oppose the projects from fear of the prospect of screening and evaluation by local Governing Boards in any decentralized district. Their fear is expressed at two levels. First, the teachers object to evaluation of their classroom performance by lay persons or outside professionals. Secondly, they oppose evaluation by the people of the ghettos, a position based on the belief that ghetto residents are not "qualified" to make such evaluations. One teacher reported: "The second opposition, which is difficult to grasp because it was never verbalized quite clearly, was that these parents were not competent to run the school.... There was a corps of teachers who just simply had no faith in 'this' group of parents to run the school."

In IS 201, teacher apprehension of screening by the local Board was fed by intemperate statements of some members of the Planning Board. But these statements were made in the heat of the teacher strike, which many residents resented as demonstrating that many teachers are not adequately concerned about the children. As yet none of the local boards has attempted any in-class evaluation of teacher performance by the board itself. In statements before this Commission, representatives from all three Boards felt that any form of professional supervision of staff performance would be carried out by professionals within the system, as it is now done. Several Governing Board members quite candidly admitted that as lay people they felt untrained to judge the work of teachers.

Supervisors

As is the case among the teachers, there are a few supervisors who individually support decentralization and have participated in the experiments. There is one position on each Governing Board for a supervisor. In each district the principals and assistant principals elected a member. However, as a group, supervisors have been more indifferent and hostile to the projects than the teachers. We heard consistently from leaders of the projects that lack of active support from supervisors, often reflected in the attitude of the teachers, was one of the causes retarding the experiment.

An even stronger negative force has been the action of the Council of Supervisory Associations, which was responsible for a successful law suit challenging the appointments of principals made by the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board.

Many supervisors are aware that local control requires a redefinition of their role and a type of person fitting to the new role. Decentralization means greater accountability to the community and therefore more direct involvement in it. This community involvement -- as was made clear to us by experiences in all three districts -- requires more emphasis on the supervisor's ability to gain respect from the community, and to promote school-community relations as the major qualifications for the office. Administrative and educational skills, the requirements most heavily weighed for supervisors under the present system, would be provided to a greater degree by special assistants and consultants under a more flexible community school system.

The Board of Education and the Central Administration

The demonstration projects and the idea of community control, as earlier discussion has shown, originated in the communities rather than with the Board of Education. The Board therefore has approached this experiment hesitantly and, apparently, with little advance planning. Its response to some extent has been shaped by the constraints of its own regulations and those of state law.

Feeling among leaders of the demonstration projects, however, is that the Board's lack of enthusiasm for the experiments has been manifested by more than mere hesitancy.

Local governing board representatives uniformly complained that the Board of Education has not yet granted any significant authority to the districts and, only belatedly, supplied unsatisfactory guidelines defining their functions. Leaders of the experiments also consistently believe that the Board of Education is not committed to the success of the projects, but has instead predetermined the failure of decentralization. The leaders cite the reluctance of the Board of Education in granting recognition of the Governing Boards, and the removal of special services from the project schools as evidence of this.

The number and uniformity of complaints we heard from all three districts suggested that the Board of Education had been unduly rigid in its approach to these projects, and that the Board's hesitation has been a substantial obstacle to the progress of the experiments. The local Governing Boards felt especially constrained in attempts to increase the number of Negro and Puerto Rican teachers in the ghetto schools -- by requirement of the Central Board of Examiners. The Unit Administrator of Ocean Hill-Brownsville reported his experiences with the examination system in recruiting teachers for schools in his district:

> We recruited a couple of girls from Florida. I said, when you get to the Board and take this examination, the moment you finish the examination call my office on the phone. The first girl...they told her she failed. I told her to go upstairs and see...the superintendent's special assistant assigned to these projects. He took her down to the examiners and he found out a seven year veteran in Florida with all of the privileges of seniority and tenure who came here, they failed her because she spoke too softly.

The Commission was told repeatedly of teachers being failed in the oral examination because of their Southern accents.

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We cannot leave the impression that all is well in the three experimental school districts. We have noted that a great deal of confusion within the schools and the community has come about as a result of the projects. But, we are convinced that this has been the outcome of hasty and inadequate planning, lack of professional guidance to the lay people who organized the projects, lack of active cooperation and support from many teachers, supervisors, and the Board of Education, and the many limitations of State law. We feel that with better preparation, a longer period of planning and transition, and more cooperation from school officials, many of the

problems which have held back the projects could have been avoided.

Increased Participation

We are satisfied that where the projects have had a modicum of success, they have demonstrated a most important thing: people will participate if they are given an opportunity to get involved in a meaningful way, and if they are made to feel that they have a stake in the success or failure of a program.

Representatives from schools in which positive effects of the experiments were felt reported to us that there was greater involvement in the schools and the community by parents, teachers, and administrators as a result of the projects. Parent Association officers in several schools reported higher attendance at PA meetings and a different attitude among the parents. A PA president with five years in office described this change:

> When our project came along with this governing board and everything, the parents came all out for it. The community got together as one instead of divided. They have been very cooperative. They have been helpful in every sense. A PTA meeting is now a joy because they will come.
>
> Before with a night meeting I might get five or six parents. Now I can get a night meeting of eighty.

Some principals also have noted a change from which they feel they are profiting. One principal in Ocean Hill-Brownsville remarked:

> I think one of the main things that the community involvement has done is to make me aware of problems and things that are happening which I might be unaware of. The administrator can't see everything that is going on in his school. Because we have parents now who are more involved with the school, they let us know more often what is happening and what they have heard and what they have seen, and, of course, they question more.

This view was supported by other principals in the district.

Participation by the parents increased because the Governing Board and the projects attracted a larger number of teachers and supervisors who had a closer relationship to the community -- people who identified more with the community because they: were bred and educated or lived in the community; were regarded as part of the community, or were sympathetic and especially concerned with the problems of the community. Staff members who shared a

keener interest in the community and its schools helped in removing some of the barriers that so long impeded communication between the school and the community.

Parents more readily approach people in whom they can identify a shared interest in their children. This shows that if many parents seem apathetic now, it may be because they feel that they have no way to express their interest, or that nothing meaningful will happen even if they do.

Teacher and supervisor participation increased in part because the experiments provided some liberation from the many constraints that restrict effective involvement under the present system. One principal spoke of a new mood in his district: "I find myself enthusiastic about this, because -- well, there is a lot of freedom for innovation in the district. In fact, we have been sort of set up with the idea that we have to start changing things."

The projects have plainly demonstrated the extent to which the current system forestalls community involvement. Uniformity, one of the keystones of the present system, works against communities that need special services and special people. Experiences in the three districts convinced us that to encourage community participation in the schools and to ease tensions that at present exist between school and community, the most pressing need of the city's educational system is for more teachers and supervisors who possess the special talents and advantages required to facilitate communication between the schools and the communities. Relevance to the community and talent in dealing with community relations problems are not adequately considered in the current method of appointing supervisors from city-wide examination lists. Although more than half of the city public school pupils are Negro and Puerto Rican, the schools' first Puerto Rican and first Negro male principals were appointed by the Governing Boards of the demonstration districts. To make these appointments the Boards had to go outside the examination lists, which required special permission by the State Commissioner of Education. The Governing Boards also appointed the public schools' first Negro administrators of rank comparable to district superintendent. Though the post of Unit Administrator is experimental and there is no real equivalent to it under present organization, confirmation of one appointment was withheld for several weeks by the Board of Education because the person chosen lacked some of the education courses required of district superintendents. Most of these appointments, although long overdue and although their effectiveness in answering a grave need has been demonstrated, could not be made outside the experimental districts and even in these districts they cannot be made permanent because of existing regulations.

New Staff Under Decentralization

We believe that the experiences of the three local Boards in attracting and appointing staff answer the fear that decentralization will free experienced teachers and supervisors in ghetto schools to flee to schools in better neighborhoods. The teachers' and supervisors' fear and distrust of local control in the three districts -- as noted in earlier sections of this report -- support the likelihood that many will seek greater security in other schools.

Yet the effect should not be overestimated. The flight of seasoned staff is no new event in ghetto schools. It is well-known and much-stressed by new supervisors in the experimental districts that one of the most critical problems of schools in communities of the poor is the shortage of experienced staff and rapid turnover among the young faculties.

Decentralization may open the doors for easier initial withdrawal by many teachers and supervisors who do not wish to remain in ghetto schools. But, as demonstrated by the experimental districts, it will keep the school doors open to another group of teachers who, from special interest and conviction, choose to work in these schools. In many cases, the new staff will bring into the school some means of closer contact with the community -- the one asset we note the system needs so drastically. Greater flexibility in recruitment and training will allow local school boards to hire teachers better suited to the community's needs.

More important, however, we heard testimony from many teachers and supervisors, both Negro and white, currently working in ghetto schools, who feel strong enough dedication to their jobs and to the success of their special challenge that they are unlikely to abandon their conviction at a time when they are most urgently needed and when they can make the most constructive contribution.

We believe -- on the basis of testimony at these hearings -- that the UFT jointly with the Board of Education has the obligation to develop sensitivity training, in-service training and on-the-job training programs for teachers of the New York City public schools. We believe further that the UFT and the Board of Education should plan and cooperate together in a vigorous campaign of teacher recruitment with particular emphasis on the recruitment of Negro and Puerto Rican teachers.

Representation

In any decentralization project, the problem of representation is likely to be among the most sensitive. We found this to be so in two of the demonstration districts.

It is difficult to say who represents any community, especially those as complex as Harlem, Two-Bridges and Ocean Hill-Brownsville, on any one occasion. In IS 201, for example, during the long controversy over control of the school, dozens of meetings were held between education officials and the community. On some occasions, the community was represented by entirely different persons, sometimes knowingly excluding representatives of earlier discussions.

The controversy originally involved the Board of Education and a handful of parents who had children assigned to the school. These parents were active in the Parents Associations of local public schools and some were members of community action groups. But in later stages, as IS 201 received greater publicity, other groups and individuals who were not necessarily parents of children assigned to 201, projected themselves into the situation and formed a negotiating committee that displaced the original group of parents in later discussions with the Board of Education. Some of the members of this negotiating committee were not from the area of the IS 201 district.

The problem illustrated by the example from IS 201 is that of defining the community for the purposes of decentralization. No matter how broadly or narrowly the community is defined in deciding the question of representation, there will always be people who will dissent because it includes or excludes too much. Here again the IS 201 experience is instructive. Prior to the Governing Board elections, the Planning Board of IS 201 had agreed not to restrict the boundaries of the community to the boundaries of the demonstration school district, but rather to encompass the entire Harlem community. Community representatives to the Board were therefore eligible for membership from the broader community and in fact some were selected from the larger area. People who believe that representation should be limited to residents of the smaller school district regard these members as outsiders. In addition, the Governing Board has employed consultants who reside outside the area of the school district. These agents, sometimes mistaken for members of the Governing Board because of the central role they play, are also considered as not representing the community.

Even when the community is defined, it is difficult to agree upon who is representative of it. In communities as large and disunited as Harlem and Two-Bridges it is especially hard, if not impossible, to find any one group or individual who can be regarded as representative in every sense of the word. There are too many views, too many persons, groups and movements, longstanding and fleeting, at all times competing for acceptance in the community. At no time could any one be said to command the backing of a great enough part of the community to be regarded as truly "representative."

We think that the problem of representation presents one of the most serious dangers to the decentralization projects. For a local school system to be pertinent, the community as a whole must feel that it truly governs its own system. In IS 201, as cited earlier, many parents who believed the community should embrace only residents of the IS 201 school district resented members of the Governing Board who were from outside the immediate district. In Two-Bridges some parents of the elementary school that was not a feeder to the junior high school in the project resented inclusion of their school in the district and have agitated to have the school removed from the experiment.

These experiences indicate to us that a citywide decentralization system should be based on an extremely flexible plan of districting. There may be some loss of opportunity for cultural diversity in the restriction of districts to existing neighborhoods, and this may itself be a valuable loss to the education of children. However, we are convinced by the failure of a strong central system to promote diversity through meaningful integration that a system of smaller units will fare no worse. The advantages offered by a greater number of districts in a community school system should therefore not be sacrificed for a goal that may not be realistic.

Community Control and Racism

Too many people have been too quick to link the call for community control with separatism or black racism. As we have indicated this shows lack of full understanding. We do not deny that decentralization has attracted support from some individuals who are racists. Indeed, during our inquiry we were told of distressing incidents of black and white racism in public schools; but, this is not to say that racists control these projects. The center of this movement is education, not race, and we are satisfied that there is no racist motivation among the predominant number of responsible people who have participated in the experiments. Among these people, we found well thought out, clear and convincing reasons supporting their desire for local control over the schools.

When ghetto communities ask for control over the schools, their demand is an expression of dissatisfaction with existing institutions and a recognition that ghetto schools require special attention which they have not obtained and perhaps cannot obtain from a central system whose basic promise is rigid uniformity. Community control to ghetto residents is a means to insure that their children obtain education especially relevant to themselves and to their community, and are taught by teachers who understand these special needs and who identify with them. One parent who fought for the idea described it as follows:

> We were fighting for it to be a school where the parents -- if they said the program in the school isn't working,

> the kids aren't learning. "We want this program changed, -- we would have some say. You know, we think that Mr. so and so or Mrs. so and so has another program that appears to be working. We think you should try it here."

Similarly, when a ghetto community calls for appointment of a Negro principal in a school, it is because they feel that in a ghetto school a Negro supervisor is more suitable because he can bring what the schools now lack: a link with the community that helps transform the school into a community institution and a figure of authority that helps bolster the self image of the children in school. This point was explained to us by a member of one Governing Board:

> Well, one of the reasons I was particularly interested in community control was that the children have never had a chance to see the people in their community in any position of authority at all. They always see outsiders who work from nine to three and go home. If they don't go home, they are bourgeois people like myself with whom they don't identify. This would be a unique opportunity for them to gain status, and perhaps to broaden their insights and motivation towards learning.
>
> I felt the main problem was lack of motivation, and I felt this would be a good thing. Also, I felt...the community knows better perhaps than the Board of Education...what we want to learn, what we want our children to know, and I wanted it to be based on the immediate subculture, some of the learning that we have...I wanted other things taught.

As the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experience demonstrates, despite the special relevance of Negro teachers and supervisors in schools attended predominantly by Negro pupils, the Governing Boards have shown no inclination to choosing staff for such schools on racial considerations alone. There are indications of some racism in the public school system; however, these are a reflection of the racism in the society at large among both blacks and whites.

Integration

The question of how decentralization will affect the future of integration in our schools did not arise at any time during our inquiries. Of course, we could not expect the new Governing Boards hampered by much more elemental problems to have answers to perhaps the most difficult of all current dilemmas. But, perhaps too, the answer may be implicit in the failure of the question to arise. To the originators of community control, local control was to ensure quality education, which was the overriding concern of all

who spoke with us. With the present housing patterns of much of New York City, integration would have to be put aside as too unrealistic to be a major concern.

Need for Safeguards

The projects demonstrate a need for safeguards in the composition of the local boards. Success of decentralization depends on the effectiveness of the local Governing Boards. If the community distrusts the leadership of the local boards or has little confidence in their qualifications for making educational policy, the community's interest will be dampened. We observed much sentiment of this kind in two districts, and, as discussed earlier, we attribute it in large part to the methods of electing the local boards. To prevent domination by any one community group and to ensure representation that will protect minorities, some members of the boards should be appointed by an independent authority, a central Board of Education, for example.

The experiments demonstrated need for safeguards on another level. We heard parents and teachers complain of irregularities during the elections of the Governing Board. Others suspected the local Governing Boards of misallocating funds, or using funds for non-educational purposes, or violating statutory standards in operation of the district. Another concern among some community people is that the local boards have not acted to adequately protect minorities from abuse in the schools. These suspicions caused disillusionment and loss of interest among people who believed them.

Whether or not charges are true, their lesson is clear: decentralization would need safeguards against possible abuses in the operation of the local boards. In particular, without sacrificing the independence of the local districts, decentralization would require some form of review of local board operations by a central Board of Education as well as some ready procedures for the central Board to hear claims against the local boards which, as interested parties, they might ignore. If parents, teachers and other members of the community feel they have no redress against abuses by local boards except periodically at the polls, or if any avenue to relief is too distant or difficult, the likely result will be disillusionment and withdrawal from participation.

Summary

We feel it is too early to judge the success or failure of the decentralization projects. Too much of the confusion and conflict that has surrounded the experiments already existed when the community boards were elected. Only the first faltering steps have been taken and those were under severe difficulties. The relationship between the local Governing Boards and the central Board of Education is still unclear, and so are the powers of the local boards.

The schools in the districts are still very much controlled by the central Board. It would, therefore, be unfair to blame the local boards or the idea of decentralization for all the mishaps that the projects have run into during development. Confusion, fears, and many errors are natural and predictable in any experiment which has no precedent, which is inadequately planned and which has little or no active support from the authorities whose backing would be decisive for success. It would also be too hasty to abandon the idea of decentralization on the basis of the early troubles of an experiment as yet untried. And it would be a mistake to give a victory to the many whose preconceived opinions have doomed the experiment to failure and who are sitting by the sidelines cheering at every blunder that gives them a chance to say "I told you so." These are the only people who will be disappointed if the experiment succeeds.

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

John V. Lindsay
Mayor

William H. Booth
Chairman

David H. Litter
Vice Chairman

Gilbert Colgate, Jr.
Kenneth Drew
Eleanor Clark French
Murray Gross
Rabbi Harry Halpern
Dorothy Hart Hirshon
Jerome M. Kay
Theophilus Lewis
Dominic R. Massaro
Frank C. Montero
Frederick W. Richmond
Cleveland Robinson
Juan Sanchez

Ramon E. Rivera
Executive Director

80 Lafayette Street
New York, New York 10013
Telephone: 566-5050